alerted our India-based security staff to be more vigilant.

Cancellation of SAARC Summit at Dhaka

206. SHRI CHATURANAN MISHRA:
SHRI N. GIRI PRASAD:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that cancellation of Prime Minister's visit to Dhaka has led to cancellation of the SAARC Summit at Dhaka; and

(b) if so, the reasons for cancellation of PMs visit to attend the SAARC Summit at Dhaka?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DINESH SINGH): (a) and (b) The postponement of the 7th SAARC Summit to January 13-14, 1993 was decided in consultation with the Heads of State/Government by the current Chairman of SAARC, the President of Sri Lanka. India had agreed to the new dates in the hope that the post-Ayodhya situation in and around India would have stabilised by then. Unfortunately, acts amounting to interference in the internal affairs of India continued to vitiate the atmosphere and it was felt that the political direction needed to provide substance and content to the functioning of regional cooperation would not be forthcoming. The SAARC Summit was, in the circumstances, again postponed. Fresh dates are now in the process of being settled through diplomatic channels.

Refurbishing secular image of India

207. SHRIMATI KAMLA SINHA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) what has been the overall affect on the country's international image and identity in the wake of Ayodhya happenings and its fall out; and

(b) what steps have been taken by Government both at diplomatic and political level to clear the misgivings in the world community and to refurbish the sagging secular image of the country?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DINESH SINGH): (a) The happenings at Ayodhya and subsequent violence in different parts of India elicited reactions of concern around the world. International media dwelt on the subject at some length for several days. Apart from media comments and public reactions, official responses emanated from over 40 countries/organisations in one form or the other. The majority expressed understanding and confidence in the Government of India's determination and ability to deal with the situation.

(b) Immediately after the incidents on December 6, the Ministry of External Affairs took measures to instruct our Embassies abroad to portray to their respective Governments the events in their correct perspective and reiterated our commitment to the ideals of secularism and the protection of minorities. The statements of the President and the Prime Minister were conveyed. Ambassadors resident in Delhi were briefed individually and in groups by Secretaries and Additional Secretaries in the Ministry. The Ambassadors of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the organisation of Islamic Countries were further separately briefed by the Minister of State, Shri R. L. Bhatia and the Foreign Secretary. We stressed the need for restraint and moderation by bodies like the OIC and the GCC so that there would not be any unfortunate repercussions in India. The Ministry kept our Missions informed of the actions taken by the Government to control the situation.

The message of the Prime Minister on the evening of December 6, was widely appreciated and contributed to containing negative reactions to the event. Diplomatic and publcity